GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS
LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:1015
ANSWERED ON:05.03.2008
AGREEMENT WITH QATAR TO PROTECT THE INTERESTS OF INDIAN WORKERS
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Will the Minister of OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government has signed an agreement with Qatar to protect the interests of expatriate domestic workers and to check malpractices by recruitment agents;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the steps taken by the Government to safeguard the interests of Indians in Qatar?

Answer

MINISTER OFTHE STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRI VAYALAR RAVI)

(a)&(b) The Government had signed an agreement with Qatar on the regulation of the employment of Indian manpower on 11-04-1985. An Additional Protocol to this Agreement was signed on 20-11-2007.

The salient features of the Additional Protocol signed with the State of Qatar are the following:

(i) It enlarges the mandate of the Joint Committee and provides for a wide range of issues that can be reviewed by the Joint Committee for promotion of emigration from India to Qatar and protection/welfare of Indian workers;

(ii) It stipulates that the Joint Committee would meet twice a year;

(iii) It stipulates that if the State of Qatar decides to repatriate Indian workers prematurely before the expiry of their contracted period, the Government of Qatar will ensure that before their repatriation full wages and other entitlements accruing to them under the contract of employment and the Labour laws of the State of Qatar are paid to them for the entire un-availed period of the contract;

(iv) There is specific provision for the welfare of Indian workers in the unorganized sector.

(v) It provides for appropriate steps to be taken to curb practices detrimental to the welfare of the Indian workers working in or seeking work in the State of Qatar.

(c) Measures have been taken in consultation with Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Women and Child Development, the National Commission for Women and other concerned authorities for the better protection and welfare of our workers, especially the vulnerable sections like women emigrants. These include:

(i) Installation of a 24/7 Helpline

(ii) Application of the age restriction of 30 years to all women emigrating on ECR stamped passport

(iii) Defining a minimum wage for women domestic workers

(iv) Stipulation of a security deposit of US $ 2500 per worker from the foreign employer directly hiring any Indian worker

(v) Compulsory attestation of employment documents of all women emigrants with ECR stamped passport

(vi) Opening of Overseas Indian Workers Resource Centre in host countries to serve as a one-stop service outlet for addressing the information and assistance needs of emigrant

(vii) Operating shelters for distressed emigrants

(viii) Exerting diplomatic pressure on host countries to extend the protection of local labour laws to the workers in the informal sector.

The Ministry believes that the ultimate protection of workers depends on their empowerment through skills and awareness. The Ministry has launched a programme for skill upgradation of potential emigrants. The programme is being implemented in partnership with State Governments and Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises. Industry Organisations and NGOs will also be involved

in its implementation.

The Ministry is planning to introduce a pre-departure orientation programme for emigrants to equip them with the knowledge of laws,language and culture of the host countries before their departure.

The Ministry is setting up a Council for Promotion of Overseas Employment to devise and implement appropriate strategies in order to avail emerging opportunities in the international labour market.The Ministry is also considering a proposal to establish a Welfare Fund for emigrants.

The Emigration Act 1983 is in the process of being amended to safeguard the interests of emigrants.